



**Agency Priority Goal | Action Plan | FY 2022 – FY 2023 | FY 2023 Q3**

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# Increase conservation of America's coastal land and waters

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## **Goal Leaders:**

Dr. Richard Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere & NOAA Administrator

Nicole LeBoeuf, Assistant Administrator for Ocean Services and Coastal Zone Management

# Goal Team

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## **APG Leadership**

- Dr. Richard Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere & NOAA Administrator
- Nicole LeBoeuf, NOAA Assistant Administrator, National Ocean Service

## **National Marine Sanctuaries**

### **Senior Lead:**

- John Armor, Director Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

## **National Estuarine Research Reserves**

### **Senior Lead:**

- Jeff Payne, Director Office for Coastal Management

## **Coordination**

- NOAA Performance Risk and Social Science Office
- NOS Formulation and Planning Division

# Goal Overview

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## Goal statement

- By September 30, 2023, in support of the America the Beautiful initiative, NOAA will advance formal designation or expansion processes to conserve at least 590,000 square miles of additional coastal and marine habitats as National Marine Sanctuaries or National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRs) to help ensure that nationally significant resources continue to provide economic, social, and environmental benefits for future generations.

## Problem to Be Solved

- Protection and conservation of coastal and marine habitats are essential to the health, well-being, and prosperity of every family and every community in America.
- The destruction and loss of sensitive coastal and marine habitat decreases shoreline protection and risks the loss of natural maritime wonders.
- Underserved communities and indigenous populations must be uniquely considered in conserving vulnerable coastal habitat and the impacts on local economies.

## What Success Looks Like

- Increased number of locally-generated, quality nominations considered for designation as a marine sanctuary.
- The addition of one new NERR in Connecticut, continued progress toward designation of additional reserves in Wisconsin and Louisiana, and responses to interest from Florida and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- Advance the Biden Administration's America the Beautiful initiative's goal to conserve 30% of lands and waters by 2030, by making substantial progress towards designating National Marine Sanctuaries. The America the Beautiful initiative supports voluntary efforts to conserve, connect, and restore lands and waters that support and sustain the Nation.

The NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 600,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters. <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/>

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System is a network of 30 coastal sites designated to protect and study estuarine systems and covers nearly 1.4 million square miles of estuaries. Estuaries and their surrounding wetlands are bodies of water usually found where rivers meet the sea. <https://coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/>

# Goal Strategies

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## Strategy 1: Support the Sanctuary Designation Process

Sanctuaries protect America's most iconic natural and cultural marine resources. Within this APG, NOAA will increase conservation at:

- **Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument**
- **Proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary**
- **Proposed Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary**
- **Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary**
- **Proposed Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary**
- **Proposed Pacific Remote Islands National Marine Sanctuary**
- **Proposed Lake Erie Quadrangle National Marine Sanctuary**

NOAA identifies areas to consider for national marine sanctuary designation through the community-based sanctuary nomination process. Nominations that successfully complete the process are added to an inventory of areas NOAA could consider for designation. Sanctuary Designation is a public process that, by law, is highly public and participatory, and often takes several years to complete. Many external factors impact the ultimate success of a nomination, including continued community and congressional support, as well as results of public comment.

### Sanctuary Nomination Process Steps:

- 1 Community Builds a Nomination
- 2 Community Submits Nomination to NOAA
- 3 NOAA's Initial Review
- 4 Taking a Closer Look
- 5 Nomination is Accepted
- 6 Nominated Area Added to Inventory

<https://nominate.noaa.gov/>

### Sanctuary Designation Process Steps:

-  1 Scoping
-  2 Sanctuary Proposal
-  3 Public Review
-  4 Sanctuary Designation

<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/management/designations.html>

# Goal Strategies

## Strategy 1: Support the Sanctuary Designation Process

### Sanctuaries Site Descriptions

- **Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument**, a World Heritage listed U.S. National Monument encompassing 583,000 square miles of ocean waters, including ten islands and atolls of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.
- **Proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary**, the first tribal-nominated national marine sanctuary designation in the U.S., would preserve over 100 miles of central California coastline and waters, including Chumash sacred sites to safeguard cultural heritage.
- **Proposed Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary**, located in New York, would protect maritime heritage resources, including historic shipwrecks, in Lake Ontario and the Thousand Islands region of the St. Lawrence River.
- **Proposed Pacific Remote Islands National Marine Sanctuary** encompasses 770,000 square miles, including the areas within the existing Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. It is one of the most pristine tropical marine environments in the world, containing seamounts that are hotspots of species abundance and diversity. The sanctuary would honor and celebrate the rich Pacific Islands cultural heritage.
- **Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary**, North America's only coral barrier reef, has extensive seagrass beds, mangrove-fringed islands, more than 6,000 species of marine life, and historic shipwrecks.
- **Proposed Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary**, located off the coast of New York and New Jersey, would conserve the area's rich marine wildlife and habitats, promote sustainable economic activities, and create new opportunities for scientific research, ocean education, and recreation.
- **Proposed Lake Erie Quadrangle National Marine Sanctuary** would encompass approximately 740 square miles of Pennsylvania's Lake Erie waters and protect the region's maritime heritage resources, including a nationally significant collection of shipwrecks, sacred places and cultural practices.



# Goal Strategies

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## **Strategy 2: Support the National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRs) Designation Process**

NOAA will complete a system of reserves representing the diverse biogeographic and typological character of the United States and estuarine-like systems of the Great Lakes.

- **Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve**
- **Proposed Atchafalaya Reserve in Louisiana**
- **Proposed Bay of Green Bay Reserve in Wisconsin**
- **Other possible reserve designation**

The NERRS designation process is state-driven, requiring that the governor of an interested state or territory submit a letter of interest to NOAA. If approved, the state leads the site selection, stakeholder engagement/public comment, and management plan development processes, in coordination with NOAA, and assists in the development of an Environmental Impact Statement.

Throughout designation, NOAA maintains communication with state partners and with Congressional delegations and provides technical assistance to external partners with the nomination and designation processes.

### **National Estuarine Research Reserve Designation Steps:**

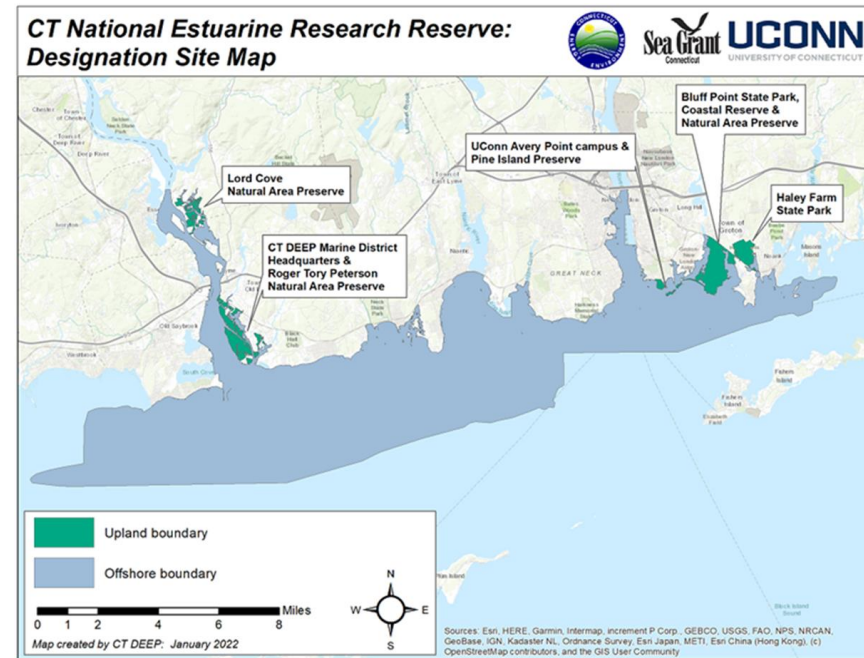
- 1 Letter of Interest
- 2 Site Selection and Nomination
- 3 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Draft Management Plan
- 4 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Final Management Plan
- 5 Designation Findings and Certificate; Record of Decision
- 6 Designation Ceremony

# Goal Strategies

## Strategy 2: Support the National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRs) Designation Process

### NERRs Site Descriptions

- The **Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve** protects 52,160 acres of the Long Island Sound, portions of the lower Thames River, and portions of the lower Connecticut River. It contains important fish species such as Atlantic salmon and the endangered shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon. The Reserve includes areas recognized as “wetlands of international importance” by the Ramsar Convention.
- The proposed **Bay of Green Bay NERR** would be on the world's largest freshwater estuary. It would add a third research reserve to the Great Lakes region and be the first to represent Lake Michigan estuarine habitats. If designated, the Lake Michigan reserve would provide opportunities to conduct research on coastal management challenges, such as harmful algal blooms, lake level variability, and chemicals of emerging concern.
- The proposed **Atchafalaya National Estuarine Research Reserve** reflects Louisiana’s unique biogeographic setting makes it a unique, addition to the NERR System, which does not currently contain a large river-delta estuary as a site. If designated, the reserve would help Louisiana address challenges such as subsidence-induced flooding of coastal communities, frequent tropical storms and hurricanes, human caused catastrophes such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and sea level rise.



# Goal Targets

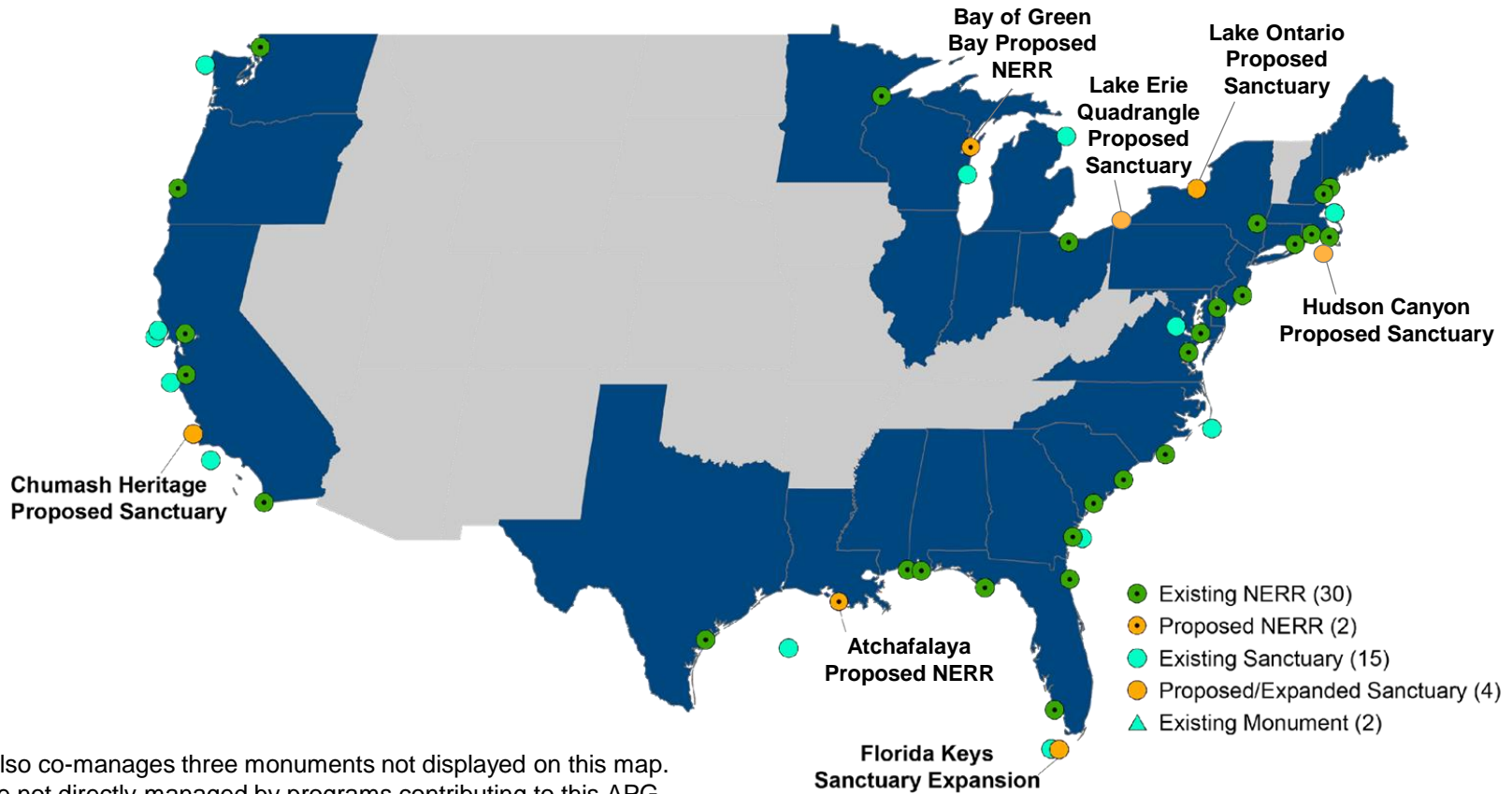
Achievement statement		Key indicators	Quantify progress			Frequency
By September 30, 2023, in support of the America the Beautiful initiative, NOAA will advance formal designation or expansion processes to conserve at least 590,000 square miles of additional coastal and marine habitats as National Marine Sanctuaries or National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRs) to help ensure that nationally significant resources continue to provide economic, social, and environmental benefits for future generations.						
By...	We will...	Name of indicator	Target value	Starting value	Current value Q3 FY 2023	Update cycle
09/30/23	Advance 590,000 square miles of new area through one or more steps of National Marine Sanctuaries or National Estuarine Research Reserves designation or expansion processes.*	Square miles of marine area entered into designation or expansion processes for sanctuaries or NERRs	590,000	0	593,582	Quarterly
09/30/23	Complete 24 process milestones across current and planned designation & expansion evaluations	Number of sanctuary & NERR designation/expansion process milestones completed	24	0	11	Quarterly
09/30/23	Conduct 10 public outreach and feedback sessions with local communities and underserved populations to provide information and support on the nomination process	Number of public comment opportunities in the nomination process.	10	0	15	Quarterly

\* The 590,000 square miles are proposed designations and expansions. The exact square miles are determined through a public process.

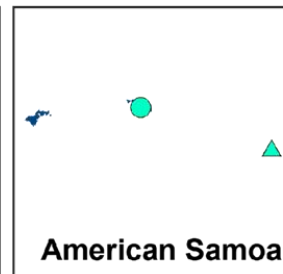
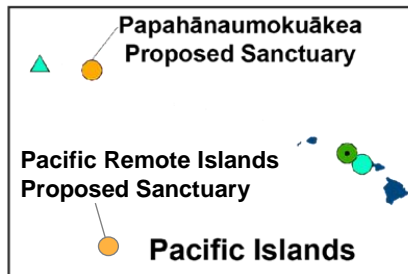


# NOAA Sanctuaries, Monuments, and NERRs

## NOAA Sanctuaries, Monuments, and National Estuarine Research Reserves

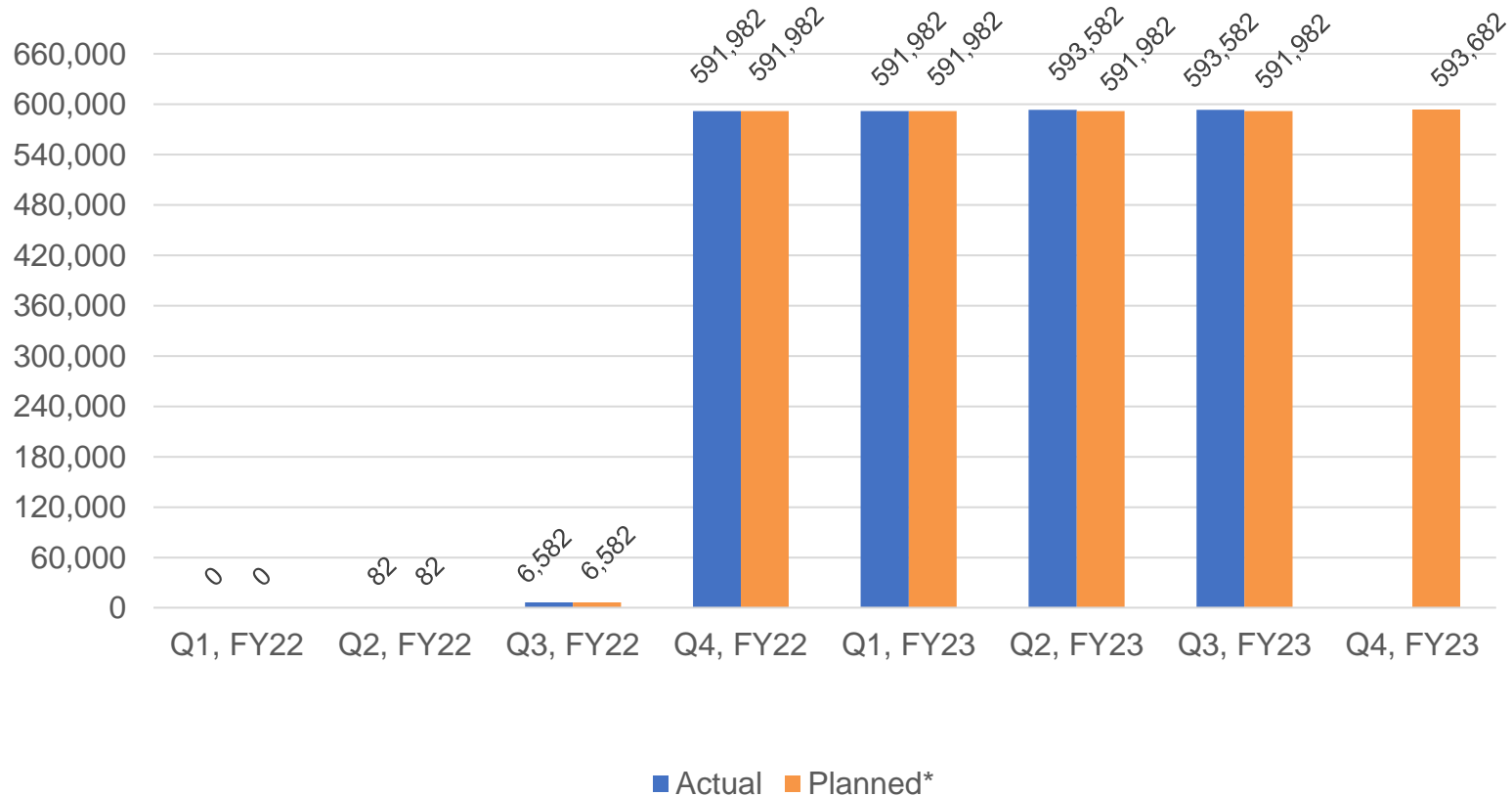


\*NOAA also co-manages three monuments not displayed on this map. Those are not directly managed by programs contributing to this APG.



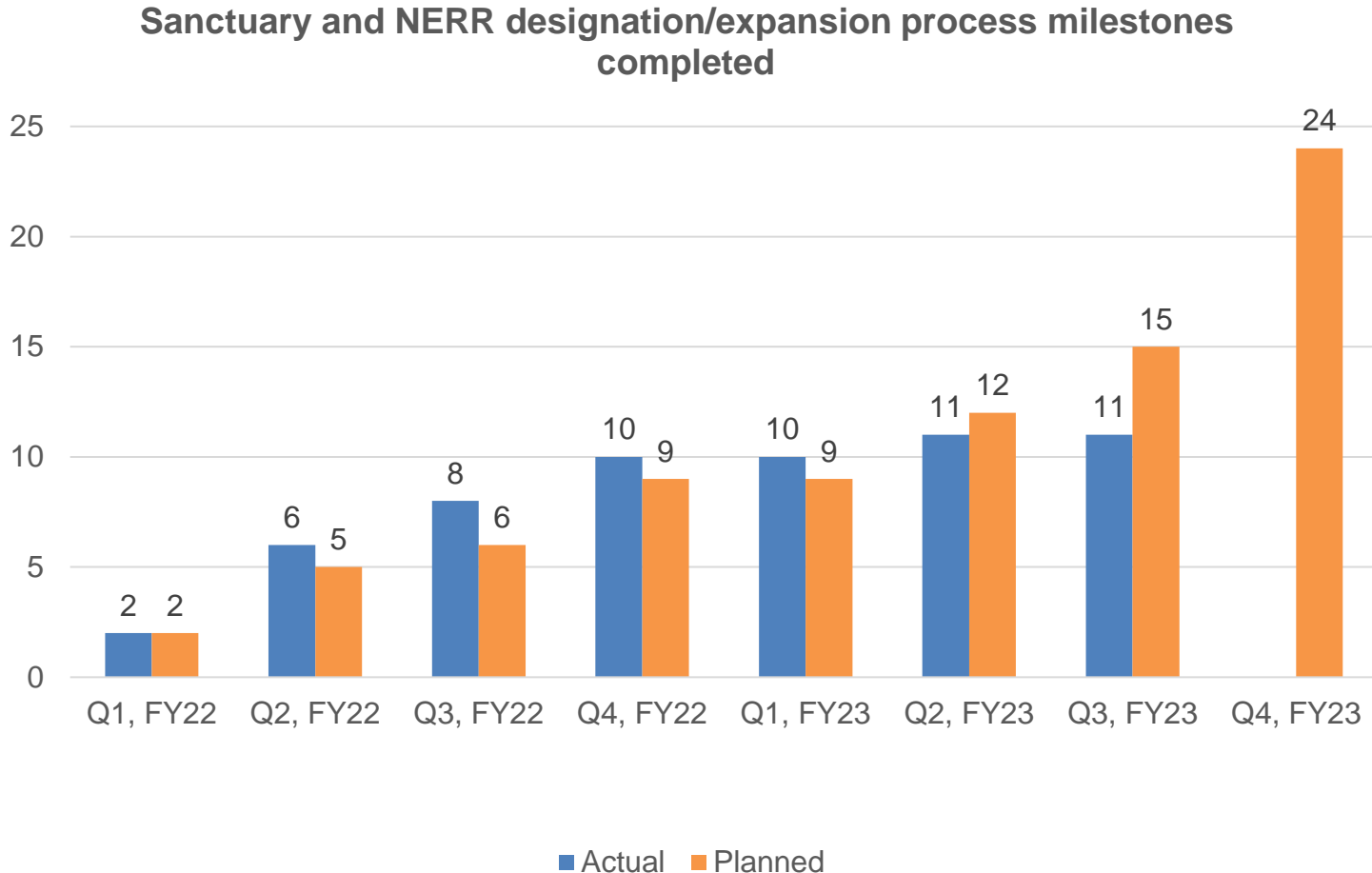
# Key Indicators

## Square miles of marine area entered into designation or expansion processes for sanctuaries or NERRs



Note: Compared to the APG goal statement's overall target which is rounded to 590,000 square miles, this bar chart shows the exact number of quarterly planned square miles determined through the public designation process.

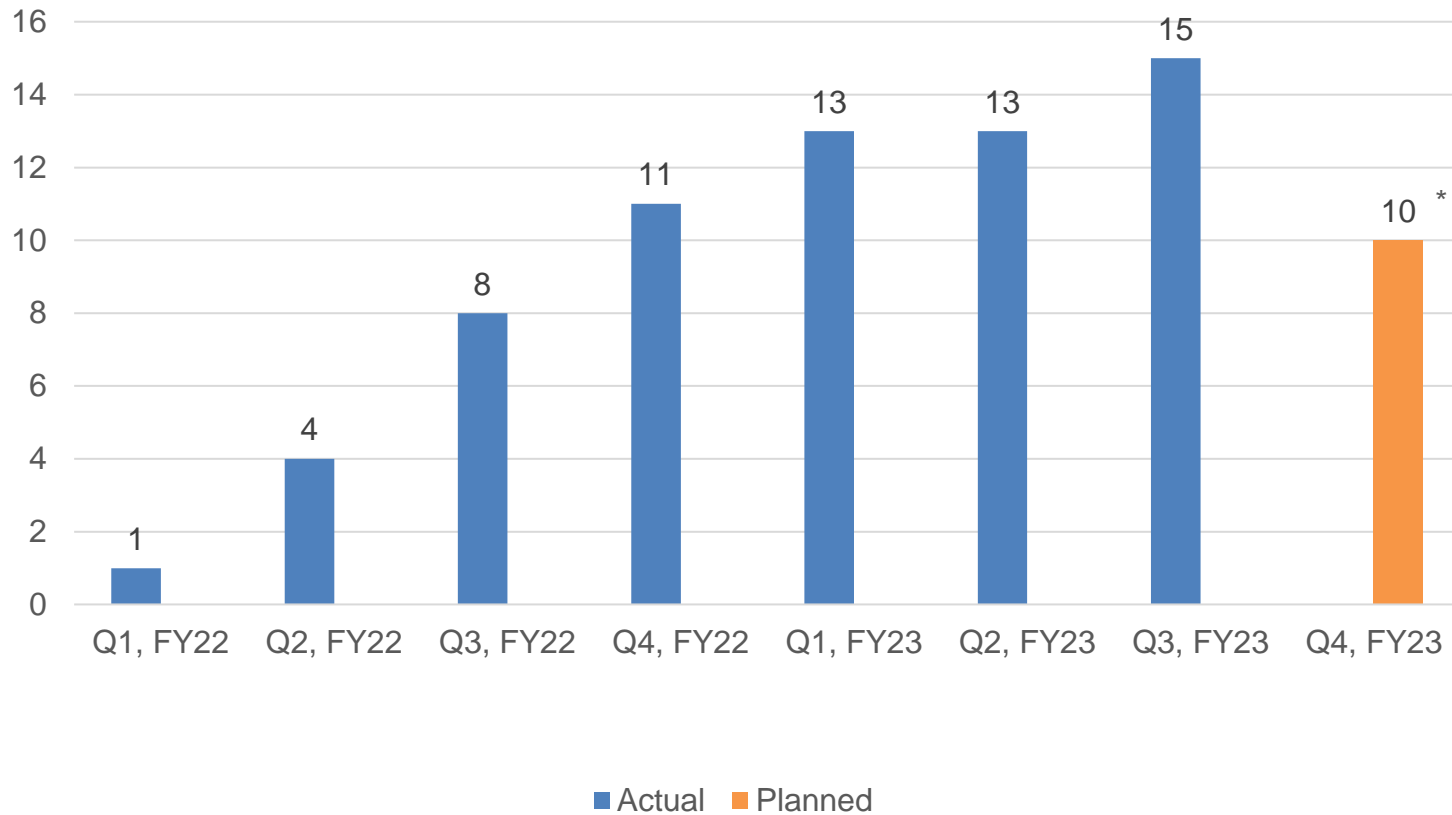
# Key Indicators



NOTE: Four milestones for Q2 and Q3 of FY 2023 are ongoing: Chumash Heritage NMS: Issue Draft EIS & Mgmt. Plan; Chumash Heritage NMS: Issue Draft Proposed Rule; Florida Keys NMS expansion: Issue Final Environmental Compliance Documentation & Mgmt. Plan; Florida Keys NMS expansion: Issue Final Rule

# Key Indicators

**Number of public comment opportunities in the nomination process**



\* Planned values indicate the total number of public comment opportunities for NERRS designation planned across the entire 2-year period. The NERRS public outreach and feedback sessions are a state-led process and NOAA does not control when these meetings occur.

# Key Milestones: Sanctuaries

Milestone Summary			
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
<b>Designation Step 1 Scoping – Issue Notice of Intent</b>			
Papahānaumokuākea NMS: Issue Notice of Intent	Q1, FY22	Complete	
Chumash Heritage NMS: Issue Notice of Intent	Q1, FY22	Complete	
Hudson Canyon NMS: Issue Notice of Intent	Q4, FY22	Complete	Completed in Q3, ahead of schedule

Milestone Summary			
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
<b>Designation Step 2 Sanctuary Proposal – Issue Draft Rule, EIS, and/or Plan</b>			
Lake Ontario NMS: Issue Draft Proposed Rule	Q4, FY22	Complete	Published in Q2 on January 19, 2023.
Florida Keys NMS expansion: Issue Draft Proposed Rule	Q4, FY22	Complete	
Chumash Heritage NMS: Issue Draft EIS & Mgmt. Plan	Q2, FY23	Complete	Published in Q4 FY23 on August 25, 2023.
Chumash Heritage NMS: Issue Draft Proposed Rule	Q2, FY23	Complete	Published in Q4 FY23 on August 25, 2023.
Papahānaumokuākea NMS: Issue Draft EIS & Mgmt. Plan	Q4, FY23		Completion subject to public input. Delayed to FY24.
Papahānaumokuākea NMS: Issue Draft Proposed Rule	Q4, FY23		DOC/OMB review required. Completion subject to public input. Delayed to FY24.
Hudson Canyon NMS: Issue Draft EIS & Mgmt. Plan	Q4, FY23		Completion subject to public input. Delayed to FY24.
Hudson Canyon NMS: Issue Draft Proposed Rule	Q4, FY23		DOC/OMB review required. Completion subject to public input. Delayed to FY24.

# Key Milestones: Sanctuaries

Milestone Summary			
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
<b>Designation Step 4 Sanctuary Designation – Issue Final Rule, EIS, and Plan</b>			
Florida Keys NMS expansion: Issue Final Environmental Compliance Documentation & Mgmt. Plan	Q3, FY23	Ongoing	Completion subject to public input. Delayed to FY24.
Florida Keys NMS expansion: Issue Final Rule	Q3, FY23	Ongoing	DOC/OMB review required. Completion subject to public input. Delayed to FY24.
Lake Ontario NMS: Issue Final EIS	Q4, FY23		Completion subject to public input. Not expected until FY24.
Lake Ontario NMS: Issue Final Management Plan	Q4, FY23		Completion subject to public input. Not expected until FY24.
Lake Ontario NMS: Issue Final Rule	Q4, FY23		DOC/OMB review required. Completion subject to public input. Delayed to FY24.
Lake Ontario NMS: Designate Sanctuary	Q4, FY23		Completion subject to public input. Not expected until FY24.

NOTE: There are no milestones for Step 3 of the designation process, 'Public Review'. During this step, the public reviews everything that was published in the Sanctuary Proposal step. The results of that review are addressed in the final published documents during step 4

# Key Milestones: NERR

Milestone Summary			
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
<b>Designation Step 1: Letter of Interest</b>			
US Virgin Islands: NOAA responds to the US Virgin Islands regarding their letter of interest for a new reserve.	Q2, FY22	Complete	
Florida NERR: NOAA responds to the state of Florida regarding their letter of interest for a new reserve.	Q2, FY22	Complete	

Milestone Summary			
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
<b>Designation Step 2: Site Selection and Nomination</b>			
Lake Michigan: NOAA participates in a series of public meetings to inform site selection for a new NERR in the state of Wisconsin.	Q2, FY23	Complete	This step is led by the state and was completed in Q4 FY22.
Louisiana: NOAA participates in a series of public meetings to inform site selection for a new NERR in the state of Louisiana.	Q3, FY23	Complete	This step is led by the state and was completed before the listed FY23 Q3 target.

Milestone Summary			
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
<b>Designation Step 3: Draft EIS and Draft Management Plan</b>			
Lake Michigan: The state of Wisconsin, in partnership with NOAA, initiates development of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Management Plan.	Q4, FY23	On Track	

# Key Milestones: NERR

Milestone Summary			
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
<b>Designation Step 4: Final EIS and Final Management Plan</b>			
[no planned milestones for this step]			

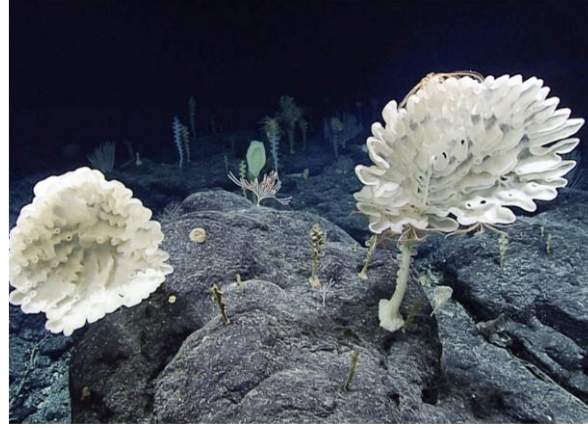
Milestone Summary			
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
<b>Designation Step 5: Designation Findings &amp; Certificate; Record of Decision</b>			
Connecticut NERR: NOAA issues a Record of Decision to finalize the designation.	Q2, FY22	Complete	

Milestone Summary			
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Comments
<b>Designation Step 6: Designation Ceremony</b>			
Connecticut NERR: NOAA and the state of Connecticut hold a formal designation ceremony.	Q3, FY22	Complete	

NOTE: Milestones are important components of designation steps, but do not always align with a beginning or end of a given step.



# Photos of On the Ground Progress



Clockwise: (1) Kayakers in the proposed Atchafalaya National Estuarine Research Reserve, (2) Glass sponges over a mile deep, inside the proposed Pacific Remote Islands NMS, (3) View of the Bay of Green Bay from the Peshtigo River component of the nominated Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. This site contains some of the best remaining coastal marshes within the Wisconsin shoreline of Lake Michigan, (4) The two-masted brig, Oxford, sank after colliding with the steamer Cataract and now lies in 160 feet of water within the proposed Lake Erie Quadrangle NMS, (5) Marsh habitat along the Connecticut River found within the boundary of the Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Learn more about the work being done on the sanctuaries: [Chumash Heritage Postcard to 30](#) (Center for Western Priorities) [Proposed Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary](#), [Proposed Lake Erie Quadrangle National Marine Sanctuary](#)

# Narrative – FY 2023 Q3

- NOAA is overall **On Track**. All NERRs milestones are on or ahead of schedule; however, some Sanctuaries milestones are currently delayed.

## Proposed Sanctuaries Designations and Expansions

- **Lake Erie Quadrangle:** On May 19, NOAA published a Notice of Intent to Conduct Scoping and to Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Designation of Lake Erie Quadrangle National Marine Sanctuary and began the public comment period. During Q3, NOAA held three public meetings and began compiling comments.
- **Pacific Remote Islands:** On April 17, NOAA initiated the designation process for the proposed Pacific Remote Islands NMS, which will encompass about 770,000 square miles. NOAA received approximately 57,000 public comments during the 45-day public scoping period. NOAA will develop draft documents and coordinate additional engagement opportunities in the territories of the Pacific.
- **Hudson Canyon:** NOAA established the first pre-designation advisory council, which will have its first meeting in Q4 FY23. Due to the estimated timing of public input and future OIRA review, as well as NOAA's increased efforts to engage with tribes and other indigenous communities, NOAA expects the completion of draft documents to be delayed to FY24.
- **Lake Ontario:** NOAA will prepare the final rule, final management plan, and final EIS to enter OIRA review in Q4.
- **Chumash Heritage:** Drafts of the EIS, management plan and proposed rule are in OIRA review. Once cleared, NOAA will solicit public input on the draft documents.
- **Florida Keys:** NOAA is working to review and incorporate the input from public comment as well as the State and Fishery Management Councils on the final documents for the expansion.
- **Papahānaumokuākea:** In Q3, NOAA completed consultation with the Fishery Management Council on fishing regulations to support the designation. In Q4, NOAA will complete development of draft documents and prepare them for clearance.

## Proposed National Estuarine Research Reserves

- **Atchafalaya:** On April 5, NOAA published a Federal Register Notice of intent to develop a Draft EIS/Draft Management Plan and to hold public scoping meetings (88 FR 20131). NOAA supported two public meetings, one in person and one virtual.
- **Bay of Green Bay:** NOAA is on schedule to meet the Q4 milestone of Draft EIS and Draft Management Plan for the proposed Lake Michigan reserve in the Bay of Green Bay.

# Data Accuracy & Reliability

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## **Sanctuaries Data**

- Sanctuary sizes are projected in square miles for the purposes of this APG. Throughout the designation process, the size of a given sanctuary can change in response to public comments.
- As sanctuary designation is a public process, all schedule and milestones are variable and dependent on results of initial assessment/scoping and public comments throughout.
- The outcome of a sanctuary designation process is not guaranteed. Before the designation becomes effective, the Governor of the relevant state reviews the final documents. Congress also has the opportunity to review the final documents.
- Sanctuaries boundaries and areas are tracked using a GIS map. Rules and related documents tracked as process milestones are posted in the Federal Register.

## **National Estuarine Research Reserves Data**

- NERR size cannot be estimated until after the state-directed site selection process is complete and a range of alternatives (i.e., proposed reserve boundaries) has been developed for the environmental analysis process. Final acreage is not available until the record of decision is issued and designation is complete. NOAA does not determine the size of a reserve, but rather works with state partners through a public engagement process to propose a reserve boundary and associated total acreage.
- Reserve area data is generated by the NERR and managed by the NOAA-funded Centralized Data Management Office (CDMO) of the University of South Carolina. Reserves generate boundary information (i.e., shapefiles) which are submitted to the CDMO for review and then made available for reporting purposes and public view and download.

# Additional Information

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## **Contributing Programs**

### Organizations:

- NOAA, National Office Service

### Program Activities:

- Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
- Office for Coastal Management

### Regulations:

- Coastal Zone Management Act
- National Marine Sanctuaries Act
- Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program Act

### Policies:

- Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad

## **Stakeholder / Congressional Consultations**

### Sanctuaries:

- National Marine Sanctuary Foundation
- Affiliated states and tribes

### NERRs:

- National Estuarine Research Reserve Association
- State of Connecticut
- University of Connecticut
- State of Florida
- Louisiana State University (Louisiana Sea Grant)
- Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority
- University of Wisconsin - Green Bay
- Territory of U.S. Virgin Islands